

# *HMS Phoebe*

## *Association*

*Newsletter*

*June 2009*



*Josie White*

*Entertains us at the*

*Royal Navy Old Comrades Club*

*Eastbourne. Sunday May 17th. 2009*

Another reunion has passed, this time it was more successful than the last two have been, for this I am most pleased, I was getting rather up tight, even thinking of giving in, but this reunion at Eastbourne bucked me up.

I was a bit despondent when only a few answered my request regarding the coach trip, only seven put their names down for it and just a very small number declined, consequently I phoned everyone I had not heard from, and ended up by canceling the trip, There is always a good reason for asking you to reply to a request, please would you do so.

Lil and I did not fancy driving down the M25 on a Friday so we went down on Thursday and were met by Jason the manager and Marco the owner at reception, our car was fully loaded with raffle prizes and memorabilia, they both got stuck in while we stood and watched, the whole weekend went that way, we did not have to lift a finger, everything was done for us, (NO! We did do some things)? I think everyone who went to the reunion will agree, the staff were brilliant, especially the two young lads who helped you to unload then took your cases to your room. It was the parking that was a let down, one bought a parking ticket from reception costing 50p a day, you then had to find a parking zone with the letter S on the sign, the letter s was very small and hard to see, but parking spaces were even harder to see, I spent a long time telling everyone what to do only to find hours later that I was parked illegally, and had been since Thursday, however my daughter found a place where my blue badge allowed free parking. I know one person had trouble with his ticket and got a parking ticket from the warden for not rubbing off the date etc, but Marco the hotel owner sorted it out for him. The entertainment that the hotel organised was, I thought good, people were dancing and on Saturday we took part in a comical act. As usual there was the odd moan regarding the entertainment, a case of pleasing most some of the time, But!!!

On Sunday at lunchtime we took up the invitation to visit the Royal Navy Old Comrades Club, where a free buffet had been laid on for us, drinks were very cheap, it was cheaper to buy doubles than singles, not sure what the beer cost, I don't drink it. There was a prize raffle and a cash draw, we won some prizes and my daughter won a cash prize, so we did not do too bad, the club members were very friendly, we were met at the door by the Secretary. Lil thanked the club for our invitation and in response their Chairman invited us to visit again if ever any of us are in Eastbourne.

The weather was mostly kind to us, a bit windy as normal on the south coast with a few rain showers thrown in, some got caught in the morning rain when they went to put fresh parking tickets on their cars.

But on Friday evening there was a big surprise for everyone, Lil and I already knew, but we had to keep the trap shut. Most shipmates were gathered in the bar area waiting for dinner when I walked Lillian Beckerton, she had come over especially from Australia, there was a loud shout and a lot of cheering, clapping, and hugging. It was a lovely surprise, unfortunately Taffy was too ill to come as well, when Lillian got up to say a few words at the AGM she was overcome and could not carry on, the accolade she received was enormous and to top it all, she took home a few of the raffle prizes too, it was a long way to come for a raffle prize??

The AGM was only a short one, about half an hour in all. We did the usual ceremony of toasting the Queen and the ship and rounded off with the announcement of next years reunion. I was hoping to get a hotel in Gt Yarmouth, but this was not to be, I did get four possible's, but they quoted nearly £90 pp for two nights only, the third would be extra and there was no entertainment laid on, we would have to organise our own, actually I was in the process of sorting that out when we left to go down to Eastbourne, on our return I had a message to phone the agent and found the cost for an organ player for one night was over £150. I had also swung across to the North Wales coast, there was only one hotel between Rhyl and Prestatyn, it has 255 rooms, which meant we would share, so that was out, then I thought of our successful visit to the Queens Hotel in Llandudno and sent them a email, I had a nice reply welcoming us to visit again, it is the same family that own the hotel and we will have three nights entertainment. They have a small car park, but there is street parking all along the sea front and in side streets, I'm afraid its pay and display, ( £3 per day). May I suggest that if you have a Blue Badge you park in the street and leave the hotel car park for the less unfortunate. The town is a couple of minutes away, beach about 20 yards, RNA Club round the corner.

OH Yes!! The cost? £120 pp for three nights. There will be a reservation form in the August newsletter, this you must return to me as we have to make each persons booking and collect the cost. We are doing the same for this reunion that we did for the Weymouth reunion and running the savings plan again, you may send to the treasurer as much as you like and when you like, for each payment you make you will receive a receipt either in the next

Newsletter, or before. You can, if you like, include the cost of parking, I will make provision for this on the reservation form. I know there is almost a year to go before we have the reunion, but arranging it this early gives you plenty of time to arrange your spring holidays for next year, we hope you make this 2010 May weekend your Spring break.

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**LET THE TRAIN TAKE THE STRAIN**

Friday morning time 1155, the taxi is booked for 1115 to take my wife and I to the station to catch the 1134 train. I'm just zipping up the suitcase when from Christine downstairs comes a cry. 'Oh! B\*\*\*\*y hell I've posted the train tickets in the post box'.

A call to the local sorting office who give us another number to phone, which goes to the answer machine. Phone sorting office again to be told I will have to ring the number again as they can't help. Phone number again and too much relief it's answered. Situation is explained and initially they don't seem too helpful, after a 'hang on a minute' they come back on the phone to say the post box in question has just been emptied and he's on his way to the next one at Barr Lane and will be there at 1120. A glance at the clock, its 1118, dashed out of the house, (Taxi waiting), and run to Barr Lane its lashing down but thankfully only 100 yards to go. Post van arrived a couple of minutes later and the tickets are retrieved. Dash back to the house, load up taxi and make it to the station in time to catch the train to Leeds. Problems over we think –Wrong !! Arrive Leeds and board the London train to find the tickets for our reserved forward facing seats are on rear facing seats!! I searched out a BR employee who told me to find any none reserved forward facing seats in another carriage and sit there. We soon found some in the next carriage and seats with a table to boot, things were looking up. We settled into the seats to have a read of the papers only to find they've been left at home. I'm moaning a bucketful when the lady sat adjacent to us volunteers to go into 1<sup>st</sup> class and 'borrow' one for me. We both thought she looked familiar so on her return after thanking her I mentioned this to her. She replied that if we watched the telly we may have seen her. Still the penny didn't drop so I asked what she was on. 'Emmerdale' was the reply. Still puzzled I asked who she played. 'Edna' she replied and sure enough it was, but with no hat to cover her long hair, and wearing spectacles. We spent a pleasant hour chatting till she left the train at Newark. A really nice person not a bit like her Emmerdale character.

The rest of the journey was uneventful but with two underground trains and two more overground trains it was a bit tedious.

The return journey started badly with ‘track works’ meaning we had to catch a bus to Lewes and board a train to Brighton to catch the London Victoria train. We sat on a nice forward facing seat everything was going great till the tannoy announced that due to Underground track closures passengers for Kings Cross would have to change at East Croydon for London Bridge, and the Northern Line. We managed to make our Leeds train with 15 minutes to spare. Problems over we think- Wrong Again!!! On reaching our reserved seats we find them occupied and are told the occupiers have tickets for them, and produced tickets to verify this. “I’ve got one of them”, I say and produce it from my pocket. The gentleman scrutinises it and agrees, “however”, he points out “Yours is for tomorrows train”. We find other seats and dread the arrival of the conductor, our tickets are only valid for the date stated, and we expect we will have to pay the full fare for the journey. The moment arrives, I hand him the tickets and without hesitation he punches them and hands them back without a word. Phew! so there is a God up there somewhere. I can say this, the train didn’t take half as much strain as we did, and it will definitely be the car next time... Brian Holland....

*(Brian phoned me when we got home from the reunion and although they had rather a hectic train journey, the enjoyment they got from the reunion more than made up for it).. Roy*

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We had a good run on the sale of slops at the reunion, most items had been in stock for a long time so we were able to reduce the asking price, in fact we reduced everything and still made a few quid profit for the funds. We have several items left that we wish to sell, including 2 new items “T” shirts 3 with a picture of the frigate on them and the words HMS Phoebe F42 in the form of a logo and a black one with “Grumpy Old Matelot” on it. They are medium size, but will fit the average person, (I am 46” and they fit me)! £8 - £15 in shops, ours are just £5.50 + 50p P&P. We also have 3 cruiser & 3 frigate (Crested) ties @ £5 each. Gold wire crested beret/cap/shirt badges 3 frigate & 5 cruiser @ £4 each. And cruiser badged polo shirts, 2 med, 1 large. @ £7.50 + 50p PP. Also we have Both ships lapel badges @ £1.50. Ladies fob type badges. @ £1.50. Mini RBL Poppy pins @ £1.

**Please contact Roy or Lil at 01235 211501 and place an order.**

Manure... An interesting fact:- In the 16th and 17th centuries, everything had to be transported by ship, it was also before commercial fertilizer's were invented, so large shipments of manure were common.

It was shipped dry, because in dry form it weighed a lot less than when wet, but once water (at sea) hit it, it not only became heavier, but the process of fermentation began again, of which a by product is methane gas.

As the stuff was stored below decks in bundles you can see what could (and did) happen. Methane gas began to build up below decks and when someone went below at night with a lit lantern, **BOOOOM!**

Several ships were destroyed in this manner before it was determined just what was happening. After that, the bundles of manure were always stamped with the term '*Ship High In Transit*', which meant the sailors had to stow it high enough off the lower decks so any water that came into the hold would not touch this volatile cargo and start the production of methane. Thus evolved the term '*S.H.I.T*', (Ship High In Transit) which has come down through the centuries and is in use to this very day.

You probably did not know the true history of this word. Neither did I!!

I thought it was a golf term, also used by er indoors when sewing!!

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### The Raid On Dieppe

The 1942 raid on the French port of Dieppe, code-named Operation Jubilee, was spear-headed by Churchill's new Chief of Combined Operations, Louis Mountbatten, who chose the Canadian 2nd Division to lead the attack. The aim was to seize and hold a major Channel port, test new amphibious equipment, gather intelligence from prisoners [and possibly Enigma-encoded German radio traffic] and gauge how the Germans responded to an invading force. A primary goal was also to boost Allied morale, devastated by losses in North Africa and Russia. Churchill hoped the use of Canadian troops would satisfy the Canadian commanders following the long inactivity of Canadian forces in England.

General Andrew McNaughton, who commanded the First Canadian Army and General H.D.G. Crerar, commander of I Canadian Corps eagerly accepted this chance for Canadian soldiers to get some combat experience. They had been stationed in Great Britain for two years without having ever engaged the enemy in a major operation. Canadian public opinion was starting to question this inactivity, and Canadian soldiers were raring to go. The British Prime Minister who felt that one Gallipoli in a lifetime was enough gave the green light to Mountbatten.

Almost 240 ships left British ports on the night of 18 August. As they approached the French coast the next morning, things started to go wrong. The ships carrying No.3 Commando ran into a German convoy, which alerted coastal defences at Berneval and Puy, leaving little chance of success. The craft carrying No. 3 Commando were scattered

and most of the unit never reached shore. Those who did were quickly overwhelmed. One small party of 20 commandos got within 180 metres of the battery. Their accurate sniping prevented the guns from firing on the assault ships for two-and-one-half vital hours before they were safely evacuated.

Two km east of Dieppe, at 0500, the Royal Regiment of Canada made their approach to the narrow beach of Puys, a small seaside village . They were behind schedule and had lost the advantages of surprise and darkness. As the sun rose, the well entrenched Germans aimed at the landing crafts that were still ten metres from the shore. At 0507, the first LCA lowered its ramp. Canadian soldiers dashed forward in a violent hail of machine-gun and mortar fire, and fell in waves, mowed down by bullets and shrapnel.

Those who made it to the heavily wired seawall were taken prisoner after a few hours of useless resistance.

Three platoons of reinforcements from the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada, were pinned on the beach by mortar and machine-gun fire, and were later forced to surrender. Evacuation was impossible in the face of German fire. A total of 200 were killed and 20 died later of their wounds; only 33 made it back to England; the rest were taken prisoner. It was the heaviest toll suffered by a Canadian battalion in a single day throughout the entire war.

On the western side of the town, the No. 4 Commando operation destroyed the guns in the battery near Varengeville, and then withdrew safely. At Pourville, the South Saskatchewan Regiment and Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada had some degree of surprise, and initial opposition was light. But as they crossed the River Scie and pushed towards Dieppe proper, heavy fighting developed and the Saskatchewanes were stopped well short of the town. The Camerons pushed on towards their objective, an inland airfield, and advanced some three kilometres before they too were forced to halt. Both regiments lost heavily during the withdrawal, as fierce enemy fire raked the beach from dominating positions east of Pourville, and also from the high ground to the west. The bravery of the Navy landing craft crew allowed 341 men to embark but increasing pressure meant that the rest were left to surrender. Another 141 had died.

The original failure to clear the eastern headland enabled the Germans to enfilade the Dieppe beaches. This doomed the main frontal attack from the start. Dieppe was also well defended by machine guns, mortars and artillery, and had a myriad of cliff caves. The heavier guns were carefully concealed, and the heavily sloping shingle beach led up to a maze of tank traps and pillboxes.

The main attack took place at 0530, thirty minutes after the flanking assaults. The tanks were to be sent ashore in the middle with the Essex Scots to the east and The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry to the west. The assault was met with intense fire right from the start.

The eastern assault was held at the beach waiting for late tank support. The western assault gained a hold in a shore-front casino but few soldiers made it across the bullet-swept boulevard and into the town. When the twenty-seven tanks of the Calgary Regiment were landed, only fifteen managed to climb the shingle banks under fire. The six that reached the esplanade were completely stopped by anti-tank blocks and traps and destroyed. Unable to leave the beach, all the remaining tanks could do was provide fire support and cover the retreat. At around 07.00, the disaster was compounded as the Canadian reserve troops - 600 men of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal - were committed to the beach due to a mistaken signal that the advance troops had gained a foothold in the town. The Montrealers took fire all the way in, and only 125 men made it back to England. On White Beach, 369 men of No.40 Commando Royal Marines landed in withering fire, and none ashore achieved more than a matter of yards. At 10.50 a general order to retreat was issued. As the tide rose, the sea was stained with red, and many wounded were carried away by the waves with the dead..

Dieppe was a pathetic failure. Sixty years later, it seems obvious that Jubilee was a bizarre operation with no chance of success whatsoever and likely to result in a huge number of casualties. In August 1942, British and Allied officers did not have yet the knowledge and combat experience to make a proper assessment of the risks of such an operation. This catastrophe was useful precisely in providing that knowledge which was later to make victory possible. The Dieppe fiasco demonstrated that it was imperative to improve communications at all levels: on the battlefield, between the HQs of each unit, between air, naval and ground forces. The idea of capturing a well-defended seaport to use as a bridgehead was dropped after August 19th, 1942. In addition, the raid on Dieppe showed how important it was to use prior air bombings to destroy enemy defences as much as possible, to support assault troops with artillery fire from ships and landing crafts, to improve techniques and equipment to remove obstacles to men and tanks. The true meaning of the sacrifices made at Dieppe was made obvious two years after this ill-fated date, when on D-Day the Allies gained a foothold in Europe.... Canadian General H.D.G. Crerar said D-Day would have been a disaster were it not for the lessons of Dieppe.

## March 14, 1943 Empress of Canada

Empress of Canada was a liner of the Canadian Pacific SS Company, 21,516 tons (Capt. George Goold), converted to a troop transport. Referred to as the 'Phantom' by German U-boat captains because she had escaped U-boat detection for three and a half years.

While sailing from Durban, South Africa, to the UK via Takoradi on the Gold Coast, West Africa, she was sunk just after midnight, off Sierra Leone, by the Italian submarine Leonardo Da Vinci whose commander gave Captain Goold half an hour to abandon ship after the first torpedo struck.

On board were 1,346 persons including 499 Italian prisoners of war and Greek and Polish refugees. A total of 392 people died including around 90 women and 44 crew members.

The survivors, who had to endure exposure and vicious shark attacks, were picked up by the destroyers Boreas, Petunia and Crocus and the Ellerman Line vessel Corinthian.

One man who did not survive was the naval officer in charge of the Italian prisoners, who failed to pass on the order 'Abandon Ship' to the lower deck thus causing great loss of life among the prisoners. On hearing this, angry survivors grabbed the officer and threw him overboard to the sharks. No formal action was ever taken over this. Da Vinci was later sunk with all hands by the destroyers HMS Active and HMS Ness on 24th of May, 1943, near Cape Finisterre.

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Our affiliated Bournemouth Sea Cadet Corp, TS Phoebe, will at last be getting a new HQ. Their Commanding Officer, Ernie Clew says the cost of building the new HQ has been found, a benefactor came up with half the cost and the Council will bear the rest. The cost some time ago was around £500,000. Building work begins in August and will take several weeks to complete. I offered some of our memorabilia to the CO for the new HQ and it was accepted, it will be placed on show in its own cabinet, it included a clasp of WWII medals, the Crete medal and certificate, photos, and documents and a cardboard model of the cruiser, (made around 1942 from cigarette packets ) these were left to the Association a few years ago by the wife of deceased shipmate L/SA John Walkden.

## **The Battle of the First of June**

The battle was fought between the British, with 34 line-of-battle ships under the command of Admiral Earl Howe and a French fleet of 26 ships of the line under Rear-Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse.

During April and May 1794, the British fleet had been searching the Western Approaches for a convoy of grain ships from America bound for France, which the upheaval of the Revolution had reduced to a starving condition. The French fleet had left Brest in mid-May to escort this vital convoy to harbour. This, the first great battle between British and French fleets in the French Revolutionary War, was actually a series of engagements, beginning with skirmishes and manoeuvring on the 28th May 1794, and a more serious brush on the following day. The rival fleets maintained distant contact during the two subsequent days of foggy weather. The first of June was fine and clear, and battle was joined about 300 miles west of Brittany.

The manoeuvring of the preceding days had gained the British fleet the weather gage. This was a vital factor in the days of sail, as the fleet or ship to windward (with the weather gage, *i.e.* nearer the direction from which the wind was blowing) had the choice of when and how to bring the enemy to action.

Howe's plans were for his ships to run down onto the French fleet, break through all along their line and individually engage their opposite numbers. These intentions were difficult to transmit by signal and not all his captains fully understood or complied with what was wanted of them. In the event, only a few ships (Howe's flagship *Queen Charlotte*, *Defence*, *Marlborough*, *Royal George*, *Queen* and *Brunswick*) penetrated the French line and brought about the general mêlée Howe had hoped to provoke. The first ship to break through, *HMS Defence* was severely handled and totally dismasted. Her captain, Sir James Gambier, was a noted evangelical and something of a figure of fun in the Navy, and Captain Pakenham of the *Invincible*, coming to *Defence's* aid could not resist hailing him, 'Jemmy, whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth!'. The *Queen Charlotte* forced her way between the French flagship *Montagne* and the *Jacobin*, a tricky and dangerous manoeuvre which so absorbed the attention of the ship's senior officers that the order to open fire had to be given by a midshipman.

Only the loss of her foretopmast prevented the *Queen Charlotte* reaching a position from which Villaret-Joyeuse's *Montagne* must, it seemed, have been taken.

Elsewhere, the battle became a series of single combats between ships, none more fiercely fought than the duel between the *Brunswick* and the *Vengeur*. Locked together so closely that the *Brunswick's* gun crews had to blast away their own portlids, they pounded each other for nearly four hours before the *Vengeur* surrendered, already in a sinking state.

All along the line, the fighting was intense, and, by the time the firing died away, 11 British and 12 French ships were more or less dismantled. Human casualties were heavy too, with about 7000 killed, wounded and captured on the French side, and 1000 killed or wounded from the British fleet. Six French ships were captured and another, the *Vengeur*, sunk, while the severely damaged remainder of the French fleet made off in considerable confusion. After five days of strenuous chase (68 year old Admiral Howe scarcely left the deck, only resting occasionally in a chair) and a hard-fought battle, the British were too exhausted to mount a pursuit. Tactically, the British had won the day, and the news of victory was greeted with wild enthusiasm in Britain, but the grain convoy from America had escaped intact.

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Lil and I will be away on holiday for a week from the 6 th June, we will be staying at Seasalter near Whitstable in Kent, it has become almost a normal practice now each year to invite shipmates from that area to meet up with us for a informal lunch, arrangements for the venue we leave in the capable hands of S/m Derek West. So far we do not know where it will actually be, except it will be a pub near Hern Bay, invitations have been sent to shipmates living within a reasonable distance of Hern Bay, and hopefully if all the invited attend there will be a nice little gathering of eleven shipmates escorted by wives and partners.

Later, on Saturday 27th June we will be visiting Chatham Dockyard for the Armed Forces Day venue. Looking at the information I received it is going to be quite a big show. I understood when the event was first evolved that it would be a free venue, now I believe it is a ticket only event, it is still free but one has to apply for a ticket which turns out to be a wrist band. One could only apply for six tickets, I have issued out five of them to my family and a Phoebe shipmate, but I still have one left, I know its late but if anyone would like the odd ticket let me know. No parking at the dockyard you must use the special signposted 'Park n Ride' its free. I'll be on my little red scooter, Lil will have her wheelie walker. We're getting too old to walk about a dockyard unaided??



These commemorative stamps were on sale in the Ascension Islands. They depict three of the six HMS Phoebe's commissioned between 1779 and 1996. They all saw various types of action during those 215 years and between the six ships they earned the princely amount of seventeen Battle Honours.

